



EU approves additional €10 million to help the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia deal with the refugee crisis

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Johannes Hahn, Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, said: *"The refugee crisis has put a particularly high pressure on the countries along the route and Europe must stand united in tackling this situation. This new funding will help the authorities of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to improve border and migration management, and support their costs relating to the guest officers sent by EU Member States and Serbia to the country's southern border. This support is complementary to the actions taken to support Greece, including through FRONTEX"*.

Taking into account the request for assistance from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the results of the Commission visit carried out in January 2016, with the technical support of the EU's border agency (Frontex), this Special Measure aims at supporting the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to improve its border and migration management capabilities, including systematic border checks and border surveillance, the identification and registration of third-country nationals crossing the border in a regular and irregular fashion, and the combating and prevention of migrant-smuggling, human trafficking and cross-border crime in full respect of the rule of law and fundamental rights. The programme is open to other countries along the route who might be confronted with similar challenges in the future and is aimed to support them in managing their borders.

Background

In 2015, around 1.3 million third-country nationals applied for international protection in the EU, Norway and Switzerland. The majority of these asylum seekers and migrants arrived via the Western Balkan route. The main route currently leads from Turkey to Greece, and further onwards through the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia.

Migrant-smuggling activities and falsification of documents have increased over the last months, as borders have been reinforced and identification and registration of asylum seekers and migrants remains a challenge for all countries along the route. As a result, several EU Member States and Serbia have deployed their border guards to the country's southern border to strengthen the country's border and migration management activities with respect to border checks, border surveillance and registration activities. The support is intended for better border management and not for building fences.

The assistance will be delivered by covering certain of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's running costs in relation to the presence of guest officers, as well as supplying the domestic border police with the necessary equipment and by providing technical assistance, as well as capacity building, to the Ministry of Interior.

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